

## **AZERBAIJAN: BUSINESS TRAVEL TIPS FOR BAKU**

**By Bakhtiyar I. Mamedov, BISNIS Representative in Azerbaijan**

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### **BUSINESS CUSTOMS**

Business cards are generally exchanged during initial meetings, with one side of the card in Azerbaijani and the other in English (or Russian). Azeri business people almost always offer visitors tea and sweets. Azeris tend to be very polite, but may appear to foreigners as vague and noncommittal about specifics in business transactions. Also, they are reluctant to make appointments more than 24 hours ahead of time, so do not worry if your program is not well defined when you arrive in Azerbaijan.

### **TRAVEL ADVISORY AND VISAS**

A passport and visa are required to enter Azerbaijan. All visitors to Azerbaijan are strongly urged to obtain a visa prior to arrival. The fee for processing the visa ranges from \$40 to \$250, depending on the validity of the visa and the time in which it is processed. Visa applications must include a letter of invitation from an individual or organization in Azerbaijan when applying for a visa.

Visas are now also available at the Baku airport, however the Embassy advises all American travelers to obtain a visa prior to arrival if possible. The visitor needs to submit one photograph, pay \$40, and fill out an application. The visa will be issued immediately and will be valid for thirty days for U.S. passport holders (note: visas are generally valid for seven days for other nationalities). Visitors needing to stay longer than one week must apply to the Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before the temporary visa expire.

### **Change in Visa Regulations at Heydar Aliyev International Airport**

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has changed the validity of visas issued on arrival at Heydar Aliyev International Airport. Effective immediately, all visas issued at the airport will be valid for seven days only. If you need to stay longer than seven days, you must go to the Ministry's Consular Department and apply for an extension. The Consular Section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is located at 4 Shikhali Gurbanov Street in Baku. The main phone number for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is 492-6755.

We have heard informally that the Ministry may revert to the previous policy of issuing thirty-day airport visas at the end of March. This has not been confirmed. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also confirmed that there will be no change to the validity of visas issued by its Embassies.

The U.S. Embassy is located at 83 Azadliq Prospekt in Baku. The Consular section can be reached by phone at 498-0335 or by email at [consularbaku@state.gov](mailto:consularbaku@state.gov).

**Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs**  
Address: 4 Shihali Kurbanov Street  
Baku AZ1009, Azerbaijan  
Tel: (994 12) 4926856, 4923401, 4929692  
Fax: (994 12) 4988480  
E-mail: [mfazer@azerin.com](mailto:mfazer@azerin.com) or [secretariat@mfa.gov.az](mailto:secretariat@mfa.gov.az)  
Web: [www.mfa.gov.az](http://www.mfa.gov.az)

### **Visa Requirements:**

To obtain a visa for travel to the Republic of Azerbaijan the following documents must be submitted to the Consular section of the Embassy:

-- An invitation from Azerbaijan. (Invitation should be sent through Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan).

For business, education and humanitarian visas: if an invitation from a receiving party or partner is not sent through Consular Department of the MFA, travelers should submit an invitation received by fax directly from a receiving party in Azerbaijan and a letter of request from the employer.

For tourist visas: confirmation from receiving tourist organization in Azerbaijan or from a hotel is required. Tourist visa is valid for exact dates of hotel accommodations purchased in advance.

For visitor visas: if invitation from the citizen of Azerbaijan is not sent through Consular Department of the MFA, the applicant has to state exact address and phone number of inviting party in the application form and to enclose it a copy of Azerbaijan citizen's identity document.

-- One completed visa application form.

Application form is available through the Embassy website or may be faxed upon request. (Please, answer all questions by typing or clearly printing in ink on both left and right sides of the application).

-- Original passport or travel document (photocopies will not be accepted).

-- Two passport-size photos.

-- Consular fee for issuing visas:

-- Transit single entry (up to 3 days) - \$20 US dollars

-- Transit double entry (up to 3 days) - \$40 US dollars

-- Single entry (up to 90 days) - \$40 US dollars

-- Double entry (up to 90 days) - \$80 US dollars

-- Multiple entry (up to 1 year) - \$250 US dollars

-- Money orders and company checks only accepted. Diplomatic and official passports are fee-exempt.

-- Processing time – from 3 to 10 days

-- All foreigners visiting Azerbaijan for a period of more than 30 days must register their passports with the local passport-registration authorities.

-- If mailed, the request must include company check or money order for \$13.65 for US and \$15.50 for Canada Express mail shipping fee or \$5 for US and \$10 for Canada Certified (Registered for Canada) mail shipping fee.

-- To obtain a visa by mail, please send all the required documents to: Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Attn Consular Section), 2741 34<sup>th</sup> Street, NW, Washington, DC 20008

-- Business hours are Monday through Friday 10:00AM to 1:00PM EST.

-- Transit and short stay single entry visas (up to 30 days) could be obtained at the visa section of Consular Department of Azerbaijan's MFA in the Heydar Aliyev International Airport (GYD) of Baku, upon arrival. The requirements are: to fill in a visa application form upon arrival, to attach 2 passport-size photos and to pay consular fee (equal to corresponding rates as given above, but cash payments only).

An additional fee to extend the visa will be required. Outside the U.S., visas may be obtained from Azeri embassies in Germany, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. For additional information on visa requirements, contact the Embassy of Azerbaijan:

**The Embassy of Azerbaijan, Washington, D.C.**

Address: 2741 34<sup>th</sup> Street NW  
Washington, DC 22008  
Tel: (202) 337-3500  
Fax: (202) 337-5911  
E-mail: [azerbaijan@azembassy.com](mailto:azerbaijan@azembassy.com)  
Web: [www.azembassy.com](http://www.azembassy.com)

**Consular Section**

Tel: (202) 337 5912  
Fax: (202) 337 5913

You can download visa application forms from the Embassy website:  
[www.azembassy.com](http://www.azembassy.com)

While crime in the city of Baku has generally not been a major problem, in recent months, criminal attacks on foreigners have increased. There is a widespread perception that all foreigners carry large amounts of cash and make ideal targets. Accordingly, the Embassy advises Americans not to go out alone at night, especially in the early hours of the morning. When taking taxis, only use those that have 'BLUE' license plates. Business visitors should arrange to be met at the airport when they arrive in Baku.

Before leaving the U.S., travelers are encouraged to consult the Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) and Bureau of Diplomatic Security website at [www.ds-osac.org](http://www.ds-osac.org) and <http://www.state.gov/m/ds/> for the most current travel advisories. Any incidents involving U.S. citizens should be reported immediately to the Embassy's consular section (Tel: (994 12) 4980335) and the local police (tel. 02).

## **HOLIDAYS**

The following National Holidays are observed in Azerbaijan:

New Year's Day	January 1
Mourning Day	January 20
Women's Day	March 8
Novruz Bayrami	March 20 - 21
Victory Day	May 9
Republic Day	May 28
National Salvation Day	June 15
Armed Forces Day	June 26
State Sovereignty Day	October 18
Constitution Day	November 12
Day of National Revival	November 17
Universal Azeri Solidarity Day	December 31

Islamic Holidays with dates to be determined:

Two Azeri National Holidays: Gurban Bayrami in February and Ramazan Bayrami in November are determined by the lunar calendar, therefore exact dates will be announced close to the holiday.

NOTE: The U.S. Embassy is closed on all U.S. holidays as well as the above-mentioned Azeri holidays.

## **WORK WEEK**

The Government of Azerbaijan does not restrict business hours. In theory, businesses are open from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Monday through Saturday. Hours may vary considerably depending on the preference of the individual businessperson. Business appointments are rarely made before 10:00 a.m.

## **BUSINESS INFRASTRUCTURE: GETTING AROUND BAKU**

Business can be conducted in Azerbaijani, Turkish, or Russian. English is increasingly used in business, however be prepared to hire an interpreter for \$50-80 per day, depending on experience.

All private transactions are in cash--credit cards are only accepted in about 80 establishments. Bring post-1990 U.S. bills in good condition and without writing or tears.

The telephone system in Baku is oversubscribed and technologically inadequate. International calls are possible, but fairly expensive. Cellular communication services are available (including GSM). E-mail and full Internet service are available via local Internet providers.

The Azerbaijani postal system is functional, but not secure. U.S. courier firms, such as DHL, UPS and FedEx, are resident in Baku and should be used to ensure delivery of business correspondence.

There is a functioning subway system in Baku, but, because of severe maintenance problems, the U.S. Embassy discourages American citizens from using it. Buses and streetcars run, but are crowded and not recommended. Taxis are inexpensive and readily available and 10,000 manat (\$2.00) will get you to most places in Baku.

Electric voltage in Azerbaijan is 220v, 60 cycles. European standard plugs and electric connectors are used.

There are numerous shops in Baku where food, clothing, and small appliances are available. Imported electronics are readily obtainable.

Drinking tap water is not recommended. Bottled water is generally available on the local market. Beer and soft drinks are widely sold.

### **HOTELS AND LEISURE TIME IN BAKU**

There are many restaurants in Baku. One of the most common local dishes is kebab, made of lamb, chicken or fish. While Azerbaijan is nominally a Muslim country, vodka, brandy, champagne, and beer flow freely. Fruits and vegetables are more readily available, and at lower prices, here than elsewhere in the CIS.

There are several hotels in Baku, built and operated to Western standards. The Hyatt Regency, Hyatt Tower, Radisson, and Hotel Europe are the most commonly used. Average room rates from \$90 to \$300 per night. In addition, there are numerous apartment buildings with private apartments readily available in different parts of town. Those located in the downtown area tend to be expensive. The average monthly rate for an apartment in downtown Baku runs \$800 to \$4,000 and up, depending on the size and quality of the flat. There are, however, some that are more reasonably priced at \$700 to \$900 as well.

Azerbaijan is famous for its carpets. There are several carpet shops inside the old city near the Maiden's Tower. Antique carpets may also be bargains in Azerbaijan. Permission from the Ministry of Culture is required by law to take antique carpets out of the country.

### **TEMPORARY ENTRY OF GOODS**

Personal items, tools of trade, and business samples may be imported with little problem. Goods to be displayed or exhibited may be brought in as temporarily imported goods for a period of time, but must be re-exported within the time stipulated to avoid paying import duties and taxes. Businesspeople traveling with laptops must declare them at time of entry. The temporary entry form covering the laptop must be surrendered on departure. For more information on customs clearance procedures in Azerbaijan, please visit [http://www.bisnis.doc.gov/bisnis/bisd/doc/cr\\_azerbaijan.htm](http://www.bisnis.doc.gov/bisnis/bisd/doc/cr_azerbaijan.htm). This report addresses such issues as customs regimes, check points, mandatory documentation and fees, and more, enabling U.S. businesses to anticipate customs requirements for goods to be shipped and compare customs conditions across countries. As customs legislation and regulations are subject to change without notice, U.S. companies are advised to verify the accuracy of related information with officials

from the corresponding Customs agency before transporting goods to our through that country.

## **CULTURAL ASPECTS OF DOING BUSINESS IN AZERBAIJAN**

Customs and business etiquette vary from one country to another. In this respect, Azerbaijan is no exception. Despite certain cultural similarities with neighboring countries, Azerbaijan has a number of distinct traditions that the savvy business traveler should be aware of. Knowledge of these inter-cultural basics will enable you to succeed in this country that has historically stood at the crossroads of Western and Eastern cultures. Keeping cultural factors in mind will make you more competitive in this market.

### **Look before you leap**

Appointments with potential Azerbaijani partners must be scheduled in advance; ("drop-in" meetings are not advisable). You can request appointments either via letters or faxes. In doing so, you'll need to personalize your introductory letter to the company and be specific about the purpose of your visit. But don't be surprised to find upon arrival that your contact is not available or has been called to another meeting. Your interlocutor generally appears within 10-15 minutes. Punctuality is not common in this country. It is highly recommended to bring along letters of introduction from your local chamber of commerce, trade association or senior corporate management. These will be helpful in fostering your image as a serious business person.

While business hours are generally from 8:30-9:00 a.m. to 5:30-6:00 p.m., executives usually begin work later in the morning and stay later in the evening. Other than business lunches, appointments with companies are normally not made between noon and 2:00 p.m.

### **Introduction techniques**

On arriving in your client's office, introduce yourself, shake hands, engage in small talk for a few minutes, and only then get down to business. Always keep in mind that you are not in the United States and business meetings can not be hurried. You should also be alert to the kind of handshake you receive. Some Azeri businessmen may engage in a more lingering grasp of your hand. By all means reciprocate. Otherwise your host will be troubled and think that you are not treating him seriously.

When being introduced at a meeting or social occasion in Azerbaijan, shake hands with all the guests present. You will want to shake hands with everyone again when you leave. When the host introduces his colleagues to you, he will be using their last names and appropriate titles. But in the normal course of conversation, you will use first names of your Azeri counterparts, adding just the word "muallim," which means "sir," or "hanim," for "ma'am." Professional titles, e.g. doctor, Ph.D., are not generally used, although they will be listed on a business card.

### **Like the host, like the card**

Azeris make extensive use of business cards, so bring plenty with you. But don't forget to have the data on the reverse side of your card printed either in Russian or Azeri (Azeri is increasingly preferable and it is the official language of the country).

Having received a business card from your Azerbaijani partner do not hastily shove it into your pocket. Instead, carefully observe the title and organization, acknowledging with a nod that you have digested the information, and perhaps make a relevant comment or ask a polite question.

During a meeting, spread the cards in front of you relative to where people are seated. In other words, treat a business card as you would treat its owner--with respect.

### **Progress can't be hurried**

Please don't be surprised or, worse, frustrated by seeing that the meeting is crawling along and no agreement is yet in sight. Be ready to have your proposals carefully scrutinized. This is typical of Azerbaijani business people. They won't believe anything until they can touch it as well as see it. It is a sign that the Azeri partner is not yet at ease with you, and complete trust remains in abeyance. This tentativeness will vanish once you have established a personal working relationship.

Most Azerbaijanis are bilingual (Russian and Azerbaijani), so you should bring an interpreter to your meeting. But knowledge of a few greeting words in Azeri will elicit a warm response from your counterparts. e.g.:

Salam, nejesiniz? [sa-laam nay-jay-si-niz] = hello, how are you doing?

Ne var, ne yox? [na var, na yock] = how are things?

Sag olun, gorushenedek! [sagh-ol-un gor-ush-a-na-dek] = good-bye, see you soon

Generally business in Azerbaijan is done either in Russian or Azerbaijani. But in accordance with the new constitution, all legal documents and records will soon need to be in Azeri.

### **Give and take**

Personal relationships are the milestones for doing business in Azerbaijan. A U.S. business person must cultivate close personal ties with his or her potential partners and associates to earn their respect and trust. These are the basic components of a sound working relationship in this country.

An old tradition of "keeping face" is important in Azerbaijan, as in many other eastern countries. You will notice it in sensitivity to status and title, and even in who sits down or enters a door first. Be prepared to follow the lead of your host.

Two other important aspects of a successful interaction are gift-giving and toasts. For Azeris the symbolic significance of a gift is more important than its monetary value. Gifts will be appropriate for the most senior members of organizations. It is also polite to present small gifts (company pens, books, clocks) to those Azerbaijanis who have been diligently arranging your itinerary and meetings with key contacts. Whether at home or business, it is considered bad manners among Azeris to open a gift in the presence of the giver.

When making toasts, emphasize your partner(s) and local personnel's expertise and your own confidence that they will make lasting contributions to your joint projects. Also

underline the importance of your project for fostering improved relations between your two countries.

### **When in Rome...**

Business attire in Azerbaijan is generally formal, including a suit and tie for men, and a suit or dress for women. Casual wear, including jeans, is suitable for informal occasions, but business formal is usually customary for visiting or entertaining in the evening. Flowers, always in odd number (i.e. 5, 7, 9, 11), are the most common gift among friends and acquaintances. If entertained in a home, bring a bunch of flowers or a box of chocolates as a small token of appreciation to the hostess. If you are someone's guest at a restaurant, that person will be insulted if you offer to pay. But a follow-up gift is quite appropriate.

### **First impressions are often wrong**

Azerbaijani interlocutors people may seem detached or uncomfortable at first sight. But don't let this wrong impression affect your judgment. Dealing with foreigners, especially Americans, is a new experience for many of them. Azeris are very warm, friendly and generous when you get to know them, both on the business and personal level. Generally, they have very positive impressions about the U.S. and Americans. You can build on this. If you use some of the suggestions you have just read, you will have an excellent opportunity to succeed in this market.

### **For more information on doing business in Azerbaijan, please contact:**

#### **U.S. Department of Commerce, R-BISNIS**

Address: Washington, DC 20230  
Tel: (202) 482-4199  
Fax: (202) 482-2293  
Website: [www.bisnis.doc.gov](http://www.bisnis.doc.gov)  
E-mail: [Chang\\_Suh@ita.doc.gov](mailto:Chang_Suh@ita.doc.gov)  
Contact: **Chang Suh**,  
International Trade  
Specialist  
U.S. Department of  
Commerce, R-BISNIS

#### **US Embassy Baku**

Address: 83 Azadlig Avenue,  
Baku, Azerbaijan 370007  
Tel: (994 12) 4980335  
Direct Fax: (994 12) 4986117 (Direct)  
Website: <http://baku.usembassy.gov> or  
<http://azerbaijan.usembassy.gov>  
[www.bisnis.doc.gov](http://www.bisnis.doc.gov)  
[www.bisnis-eurasia.org](http://www.bisnis-eurasia.org)  
E-mail: [Bakhtiyar.Mamedov@mail.doc.gov](mailto:Bakhtiyar.Mamedov@mail.doc.gov)  
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